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## 9. FURTHER RECORDS OF GREAT KNOT *CALIDRIS TENUIROSTRIS* AND RED KNOT *CALIDRIS CANUTUS* FROM THE NORTH-EAST COAST OF INDIA<sup>1</sup>

S. BALACHANDRAN<sup>2,3</sup> AND P. SATHIYASELVAM<sup>2,4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Accepted October 03, 2006

<sup>2</sup>Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, S.B. Singh Road, Mumbai 400 001, Maharashtra, India.

<sup>3</sup>Email: balachand@hotmail.com, bnhsbala@rediffmail.com

<sup>4</sup>Email: sathiyaselvam11@rediffmail.com

In 2002-03, many interesting records of uncommon waterbird species were obtained from Chilika Lake (19° 28'-19° 54' N; 85° 05'-85° 38' E, Orissa, India) during our research project entitled "Habitat evaluation of Chilika Lake with special reference to birds as bio-indicators" involving bird-banding technique as one of the objectives to assess the population dynamics of waterbirds. On November 25, 2002, one Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* was trapped from the soggy land in Parikud area of the Lake. It was ringed, aged, measured, weighed and examined for moult before release. Interestingly, we recaptured the same bird exactly after 17 days from the same place. A few individuals were also sighted in 2004-05 season. These records helped to plug the gap in the status and distribution of this species in the Indian wintering grounds, especially along the east coast. As per the available records (Ali and Ripley 1983), the Great Knots migrate from their breeding grounds in Siberia to the Indian subcontinent during winter. This species is also recorded from Assam, Kolkata, Chennai, Andaman and Lakshadweep Islands (Ali and Ripley 1983). Until Balachandran (1997) reported the Great Knot as a regular winter visitor to the south-east coast of India, the status of this species was known as a rare winter visitor to the east coast of India, with a few stray records at Point Calimere (Ali and Hussain 1981) and Pulicat Lake (Mohapatra and Rao 1993). Recently, this species was found occurring regularly at Point Calimere as was evident from the number of birds ringed during the bird banding training programmes organized between 1999 and 2002 (Daniel and Balachandran 2002). A total of 250 individuals were sighted at Jumbodweep of Sunderbans during a field visit by us in October 2004, and 20 individuals were sighted from the same place during the first week of January 2005 by the Spoonbilled Sandpiper Expedition Team (Zöckler *et al.* 2005). A flock of 54 birds were seen by this team during the mid-winter Waterfowl Count-2005 carried out at Bhitarkanika. These records of this species at Chilika,

Bhitarkanika and Sunderbans helped to establish this species as a regular, uncommon winter visitor to the entire eastern coast. Moreover, the record at Chilika Lake is the first record for this species.

Similarly, three individuals of the Red Knot *Calidris canutus* were caught at Nalabana Island on February 25, 2003. Recapture of one of the individuals after 16 days in the same area is interesting and worth mentioning. A total of twenty three and a single Red Knot were recorded during October 2004 and January 2005 respectively from Jumbodweep of Sunderbans. For the Red Knot, Balachandran (1990) and Rao and Mohapatra (1993) have revised the 'rare vagrant' status assigned by Ali and Ripley (1983) and Cramp and Simmons (1983) to a regular uncommon winter visitor to the south-east coast. Further extension of the wintering range up to Sunderbans was established through the ringing of Red Knots at Chilika and sighting at Sunderbans (Zöckler *et al.* 2005).

The measurements of Red Knots ringed at Chilika tallied with that of the measurements obtained for the subspecies *rogersi* reported by Balachandran (1998) in the south-east coast wintering ground of India. Though the sample size is small, it is helpful to predict that the subspecies found in the entire east coast may belong to *rogersi*, which breeds in east Siberia and winters in Australia.

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## 10. UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE OF FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK *DENDROCYGNA BICOLOR* (VIEILLOT 1816) AT CHILIKA LAKE<sup>1</sup>

P. SATHIYASELVAM<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Accepted October 03, 2006

<sup>2</sup>Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, S.B. Singh Road, Mumbai 400 001, Maharashtra, India.  
Email: sathiyaselvam11@rediffmail.com

We were in the northern sector of the Chilika Lake in a motor boat from Kaluparaghat to Tinimuhani (Confluence point of three tributaries of the River Mahanathi, namely Daya, Bhargavi and Nuna), around 1130 hrs, when we saw a large congregation of birds in the open water. From a distance they looked like Gadwall *Anas strepera*. But, when we reached closer, we found that they were darker than the Gadwall and the twittering sound was diagnostic. They were brownish black and had a rusty-whitish collar around the foreneck like in the Fulvous Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor*; I could confirm the identity from the white band formed by the upper tail coverts in flight. Meanwhile, our boatman moved the boat closer to the flock. This congregation consisted of c. 7,250 Fulvous Whistling-Duck. The unique composition without any other species was amazing to watch. I marked the exact geographical location of the area with the help of Global Positioning System (GPS) as 19.83° N; 85.47° E. Without disturbing the flock, we moved around the congregation and determined the water depth in three places. The depth varied between 30 and 40 cm. Further south-east we observed two more flocks of c. 1,500 and 4,600 individuals each at 19.83° N; 85.47° E and 19.83° N; 85.48° E respectively. These, however were mixed flocks; the other duck species in the flock were, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, and Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*.

Ali and Ripley (1983) mention the Fulvous Whistling-Duck as a resident and nomadic species which breeds in Bengal, usually less common than the Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*, and occurs in smaller flocks. But the sighting of 7,250 birds in a single flock similar to other dabbling and diving ducks is a rare phenomenon for this species. However, such a congregation of the Fulvous Whistling-duck was never observed thereafter. Altogether the total number observed (14,490) was over 70% of its geographical population as per the estimates given by the Wetlands International (2002).

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